

Notes on the post-fire recovery of plants at Wilsons Promontory

After the fire at Wilsons Promontory in April 2005, a group of South Gippsland naturalists volunteered to assist in monitoring the recovery of the vegetation. Monitoring means checking, observing and recording, without interfering (McDonald, 2005). Our aim, like that of Angair after the 1983 wildfire (Wark, 2000), was to document the post-fire recovery of threatened Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs), to compare them with unburnt areas of these EVCs and to obtain information for use by Parks Victoria in the planning of conservation management. The EVCs formally being monitored are Coast Banksia Woodland and Coast Dune Scrub Mosaic.

The notes presented here are based on observations made while executing the monitoring program for Parks Victoria, but the paper does not include analysis of the data. Rather, it presents a broad overview of post-fire recovery by plants at Wilsons Promontory.

The observations presented here were obtained in different seasons and at different intervals after the fire, either during the course of walking along the tracks to the Light Station, Windy Saddle or Mt Oberon, along Waterloo or Oberon Tracks or while collecting quadrat data for the monitoring program.

Early colonisers

Immediately after the fire, thousands of seedlings appeared, many crowded along tracks where ashy topsoil had washed down. All our plant knowledge was called on to identify the different species from the shape, colour, texture and arrangement of the leaves. Most of us could identify seedlings of eucalypts and acacias to generic level. Of the seedlings, *Hakea* were among the most prolific. We had to wait some months before we were able to get to specific level, although we had some ideas because of the mature plants in the vicinity. The *Hakea* became Bushy Needlewood *Hakea sericea*, one plant

found flowering already in August 2006.

We found it difficult to distinguish between Tree Everlasting *Ozothamnus ferrugineus* and Dogwood *Cassinia aculeata* seedlings, both species when small having leaves of similar length and no flowers. She-oak seedlings were probably Drooping She-oak *Allocasuarina verticillata*; however, we had to take care to find cotyledons to distinguish them from root suckers. Other seedlings found were *Dillwynia* and *Pultenaea* species, Sweet Bursaria *Bursaria spinosa* and Silky Guinea-flower *Hibbertia sericea*. Along Telegraph Track, amid the burnt Swamp Paperbark *Melaleuca ericifolia* thickets, there were large areas thick with Golden Spray *Viminaria juncea*, most flowering in the summer of 2006-07. This is a fast-growing shrub considered to be a good substitute for introduced broom species in gardens.

Annuals, of which we have seen two flushes of seedlings in the first two years, include Shade Pellitory *Parietaria debilis*, Common Bottle-daisy *Lagenophora stipitata*, Annual Bluebell *Wahlenbergia gracilentia* and Jagged Fireweed *Senecio biser-ratus*. Unfortunately, the invasive weed Tall Fleabane *Conyza bonariensis* also has produced two flushes of seedlings. Another weed was the Common Centaury *Centaureum minus*, but this was not as prolific as Fleabane.

Perennial herbs that covered the ground very quickly were Common Raspwort *Gonocarpus tetragynus*, Austral Stork's-bill *Pelargonium australe*, Cinquefoil Crane's-bill *Geranium potentilloides*, Variable Stinkweed *Opercularia varia*, Running Postman *Kennedia prostrata*, Hairy Pennywort *Hydrocotyle hirta*, Swainson-pea *Swainsona lessertiiifolia* and violets *Viola hederacea*, *V. sieberiana*, *V. cleistogamoides* and *V. betonicifolia*. These herbs can be so entangled that distinguishing between individual plants and seedlings or regrowth from perennial rootstock is difficult. It was easier to count individuals of Common Woodruff